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“Ah...But It Is”

by Rev. Kim Wood, Conference Minister

In the February 4th edition of the SECUCC Conference Connection, I wrote an article titled “This Is NOT Normal” in response to the plethora of gun violence in our nation, especially of that inflicted on people with black and brown skin (to read the article [visit this link](#)). Since that time, received insightful feedback, had time for reflection, prayed, and, I hope, gleaned a few kernels of wisdom along the way. So, please consider this a re-organizing of my thoughts from my previous article. I hope that my own deliberations might invite us into a more intentional conversation, and, more importantly, that they will help move us as the Southeast Conference from talk to active engagement.

While I am constantly trying to recognize and address how my whiteness lens clouds my vision, I am regularly awakened to the fact that I have a long way to go. Unlike a cataract, which can be precisely and now, somewhat routinely, removes once the decision has been made, the lens of whiteness is made up of many layers that, more like an onion, must be peeled back with great determination, one at a time. It requires diligence and commitment. Sometimes, it feels like the layers are multiplying, so deeply are they ingrained into the DNA. I say this not as an excuse, but to remind most of us who live life through this lens must be constantly attentive and vigilant to do this work. We cannot snap our fingers and, “Poof!” it’s gone. Nor can we hand it off to someone else to fix.



That being said, I have come to see how my lens of whiteness cast its shadow as I wrote “This Is NOT Normal.” I spoke in the context of an inclusive “us.” Yet the words on the page flowed from a perch that has

afforded me the luxury of not experiencing the atrocities of gun violence and police brutality as part of my daily life. It's easy claim what is "normal" as what I experience in my life, but that assumes that "us" is just like me and that the realities of others in "us" are just blips in the social order or emerging concerns to be tamped down.

The reality is that gun violence, both unsanctioned and sanctioned, is "normal" because it is tightly woven into the fabric of some of our daily lives. If we are the "us" we claim to be as the Southeast Conference, then gun violence is a normative part of our collective lives. I can't explain it away as a possible eventuality that must be avoided. And we cannot afford to disregard it as something that is happening to others but not "us." If something is a happening to even one of us, then it must be considered a reality for all of us.

Gun violence and brutality are not anomalies. I wish that they were, but they aren't even something new. They have been part of our lives for the entirety of our existence as a colonial nation. It may be more visible to us now that we have almost instantaneous access to information with social media, but it is still too frequently ignored and too easily dismissed.

In 2021, The Reverend John Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, penned an article about the then new program ***Join the Movement*** that was launched at General Synod that year. As he introduced this intentional UCC movement toward racial justice, he named actionable steps for us to take toward a new reality:

- ***We must all do our part to commit to truth telling.***
- ***We must be vigilant in our dedication to dismantle the vestiges of white power and privilege.***
- ***We must uncenter whiteness as the norm.***
- ***We must recenter a Jesus whose love was freely offered to all.***
- ***We must recreate the body of Christ in the image and likeness of a God who shows no partiality.***

As gun deaths by murder, suicide, and accidents continue to rise and the tools of fear and brutality, particularly on brown and black skinned siblings, continue to be used as weapons of control and power with little or no repercussion, I believe that we, the Southeast Conference UCC, cannot sit idly by. We cannot engage these atrocities as if they are some ethereal exercise for a later day, not if we are truly Jesus followers gathered to seek justice, love kindness, and walk in humility with God. I, for one, know that I have to start by addressing my own lens of whiteness and my own privilege. I pray that all of us with that log in our own eye can work on

removing it so that we might see more clearly and act with more clarity. But I also know that we are stronger when we work together. And so, I want to invite you to the table with me to that we might listen, share, learn, reflect, and grow more effectively as one body in order to act more effectively as the body of Christ that the points shared above might lead to fruitful change and human wholeness. Please watch for opportunities in the very near future to begin this work. We can really only do this together.

News from the Conference Office

From our Generosity Coordinator

by Min. Carrole Moss

I send you greeting with the Joy of the Lord, which is my strength!!

As we draw nearer to celebrating this season of Lent, which begins February 22 and ends on April 6, 2023. The goal of Lent is not just trying to stop doing something you love it is an opportunity to draw nearer to God our Creator. Our sacrifices might seem significant, but pales in comparison to the sacrifices made on the cross. (1 Peter 2:24)



Listed are a few things that we can give up for Lent:

1. **Complaining!** Philippians 2:24 states it clearly: "Do everything without complaining or arguing." Choose gratitude over grumbling.
2. **Gossiping!** It's incredibly easy to talk about someone else and pick apart their choices. Voicing doubts about their intentions, their intentions, or something they've done can roll off the tongue effortlessly. Ephesians 4:29 states: "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as it fits the occasion, that it may give Grace to those who hear." 40 days have the potential to help- tame and transform your tongue in a beautifully biblical way.
3. **Worrying!** While we wish it were possible to stop fears and concerns completely, choosing to go to God with our smallest day-to-day worries instead of all the "what ifs" I one idea to help you to live out your faith. 1Peter: 5-7 states: "Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you." This could be the right time for pursuing therapy

and trusting Jesus. Isaiah 9: 5 says "WONDERFUL COUNSELOR"!

4. **Saying NO!** Sometimes we turn down opportunities out of fear or a lack of energy. During this 40 days of Lent, some of us might find it transformative to look for ways to say yes or at least pause to consider the opportunity. Being aware of the possibility that God may be opening a new door is a great way to be more open minded with our decisions and seeking God's will.
5. **Alcohol!** You might be familiar with the benefits of abstaining from alcohol for a substantial time, like clearer skin, better sleep and a clear mind. Abstaining from alcohol and other spirits is a way to limit something that you typically enjoy and refocus on the Holy Spirit throughout this period of Lent.
6. **Clutter!** How wonderful it would be if we could snap our fingers and make clutter disappear, but the next best thing is..just stay on top of it ourselves. Keep your space organized; that will hopefully create a clean headspace as well. When we don't feel so bogged down by our little jumbled messes, we can better focus on what really matters in life.

These are just a few ideas/suggestions of other things to include in your fasting routine. There so many other suggestions. Sure hope this is helpful. Have a wonderful Lenten season. Fasting can be hard for some of us, but remember it is cleansing and allows us to spend more time with God.

Thank you all for your continued support of this Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ. We are grateful.

Blessings as we continue to Journey...TOGETHER.

Life in the Southern Region of the UCC

a guest article by Rev. John Vertigan, Conference Minister, Florida Conference

Perhaps you've been reading about the recent Florida government interruption of life at New College in Sarasota, Florida. A lead article in the Orlando Sentinel on February 1, 2023 begins this way: *"Former Florida House Speaker Richard Corcoran is slated to become the next president of embattled New College of Florida, while Gov. Ron DeSantis is pushing to cut diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and curtail faculty tenure on state university campuses. All of these planned changes apparently are intended to further*



DeSantis' campaign against what he describes as a "far-left" agenda in higher education."

Current and former students, faculty, and education experts from around the country are decrying this incursion into higher education by one seeking political points to engage a base of voters who have bought into the so called 'anti-woke' movement. It's time for the church to raise our voice, too. It is a different voice that needs a platform you can provide.

Here's something you maybe didn't know: "In 1960 New College was founded as a private liberal arts college in cooperation with the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries (Congregational); in 1962, at the campus dedication ceremony on November 18, earth from Harvard was mixed with soil from New College to symbolize the shared Congregationalist origins and high academic ideals of the two institutions."

The history of our United Church of Christ is one of valuing education and encouraging freedom of thought as each generation shapes a sound future for itself and those who will come after them. The Florida government attack on New College is an attack on foundational values that have shaped our United Church of Christ culture for generations. I encourage you to reach out to your legislators and to the governor's office. Make it known that we value the high academic ideals upon which New College was founded and that we object to this hijacking of higher education at New College and on campuses across the state of Florida.

Save the Date for our 57th Annual Meeting

Join us on **June 2 and 3, 2023** at Kirkwood United Church of Christ in Atlanta for our 57th Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference. More details to be announced soon.

Yearbook Reporting Update

Thank you all who have completed their Yearbook reporting this year. In addition to those we thanked in the last issue of the Conference Connection, we thank these churches for submitting their information in the last two weeks:

- First United Church in Belvidere
- Forgiving Heart
- Peace Congregational
- Unity Worship Center

- Emmanuel UCC
- Spirit of the Cross
- Pilgrim Church in Birmingham
- Covenant Community Church

With these churches we are up to 16. Only 41 more to go. **Please complete your reports by February 28!**

- The documents you can either send into the conference or use to collect your data to make it easier to complete the online form is found here:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/12xaRBOEX0VA9xaJqU0HiF3Fao0BvZGyj/view?usp=sharing>.
- The online form to submit your church's report is here:
<https://forms.gle/zZfHi4wAt5xGcQHn9>.
- The supplemental survey is found here to fill out:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2023_supplemental_survey_YB

Calling all Authorized Ministers of the Southeast Conference – We need your Information!

January means it is time to submit your Annual Information Review again. All Authorized Ministers with Standing in the Southeast Conference are required to fill out this form once a year. This helps us to make sure we have current contact information and call information for you on file. This is also how your information is updated in the national records, including Access UCC and the Profiles System. Please take the time to fill yours out today. We need all forms by February 28, 2023 for any updates to be in this year's directory.

SUBMIT YOUR ANNUAL REVIEW FORM



Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2023. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

Week of February 19

- Trinity Congregational UCC; Athens, Alabama
- Tim Downs
- Albert Ghergich
- Darryl Trimiew
- Maxine Simmons Bolden

Week of February 26

- United Church of Cookeville; Cookeville, Tennessee
- PATHWAYS Theological Education Program
- Evelyn Oliviera
- Thomas Mitchell
- David Speno

Churches in Transition

First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Holy Trinity Community Church, Nashville TN; First United Church, Belvidere TN; Deer Lodge Congregational Church, Deer Lodge TN; Brookemeade Congregational, Nashville TN; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA; Sandy Creek, Lafayette AL; First Congregational Christian, Montgomery AL; Open Table UCC, Mobile AL; Unity UCC, Montgomery, AL; Safe Harbor Family Church, Clinton MS

News from the Wider Church



UCC offers prayers, launches appeal to aid Turkey and Syria after earthquake

by Kayla Berkey | published on Feb 14, 2023

The United Church of Christ is offering prayers for the region encompassing Turkey and Syria as the death toll continues to climb following one of the strongest earthquakes in 100 years. Responders who have worked hard in the cold weather continue to rescue victims from the ruins as the odds of survival begin to wane over a week since the Feb. 6 quake. Many survivors are struggling to find enough food, water and basic amenities.

UCC Global H.O.P.E. has launched the Turkey and Syria Emergency Appeal to direct financial support to partners responding in the areas of greatest need for relief and long-term recovery. Read more on the UCC website: <https://www.ucc.org/ucc-offers-prayers-launches-appeal-to-aid-turkey-and-syria-after-earthquake/>

Open and Affirming Coalition Names New Executive Director

The Coalition's Leadership Team and Executive Director Search Committee

are very excited to announce the new Executive Director of the Coalition: Rev. Dr. Katrina Roseboro-Marsh. After a months long search process with many excellent applicants, the Search Committee saw that Dr. Marsh was uniquely situated, with her skillset and experience, to lead the Coalition forward. Dr. Marsh accepted the position and officially starts today (February 16)! If you'd like to learn more about her, you can view the press release [here](#). Please help us spread this great news far and wide!



One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) Offering

Sunday, March 19, 2023, the fourth Sunday of Lent, is the recommended date for the offering. Unlike previous years, OGHS promotional materials will **NOT** be automatically mailed to your churches this year so that you may order only the quantities you need from [UCC Resources](#). For your newsletters and worship planning purposes, graphics, videos and other resources are already available for download on the [OGHS website](#). Additional resources will be added soon. Thank you for your enthusiasm in promoting the One Great Hour of Sharing offering in your churches, and for sharing your generous gifts to ensure that *we work for the benefit of all*.

Trainings, Conferences & Events



PATHWAYS
THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

PATHWAYS Theological Education, Inc. Upcoming Courses

PATHWAYS exists to offer a range of stimulating, accessible, and affordable online progressive Christian resources for church leaders, faith explorers, pastors, and those discerning various vocations and callings within and outside the church community.

Three 6-week upcoming courses beginning March 1, 2023

These three foundational 6-week courses begin March 1 and end on April 18 and cost \$325 each. They are open to everyone. [Find out more »](#)

- Making Sense of Theology (Foundational Level) [Find Out More »](#)
- The Art Of Preaching (Applied Level) [Find out more »](#)
- Professional Boundaries And Ministerial Self-Care (Integrated Level) [Find out more »](#)

Six 6-week upcoming courses beginning May 17, 2023

In May, two foundational courses, two applied level courses and two integrated courses are offered.

- Ethics and a Life of Meaning (Foundational Level)
- Faith Formation (Foundational Level)
- Introduction to Spiritual Health (Applied Level)
- New Testament Hermeneutics (Applied Level)
- Preaching for Special Occasions (Integrated Level)
- Theology of Gender and Sexuality (Integrated Level)

Learn more on the PATHWAYS website: pathwaystheological.org

Online Seminar from Eden Seminary

The Future of Co-Vocational Ministry

Date(s) - 02/21/2023

6:30 pm - 8:00 pm

Join Eden Seminary to get an update on the latest trends from The Hartford Institute of Religious Research, about the state of the church, and what ministry jobs will look like in the future? This event is for all. It is also part of the Eden students' Progressive Christian Leadership Seminar. Learn more: <https://www.eden.edu/events/co-vocational-ministries-seminar/>

Conference Calendar

February 21 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EST

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

February 28 @ 9:30 am - 11:00 am EST

[Zoom Conversation for Specialized Ministers](#)

February 28 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EST

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

March 7 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EST

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

March 9 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EST

[Board of Directors Meeting](#)

March 14 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

March 16 @ 1:00 pm - 1:30 pm EDT

[Live Harp Meditations for Ministers](#)

View the full calendar of events online: <https://www.secucc.org/events/>

Contact Us

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